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ABSTRACT

Designed to work with and be integrated into the existing curriculum, this learning packet contains activities that encourage discussion and critical thinking by students about the U.S. Constitution. The first activity teaches fundamental principles of government while the second asks students to explain how the Constitution was written through rewriting its preamble in their own words. The third activity encourages critical thinking about the protection of civil rights by presenting different situations and having students decide how people are protected by the Bill of Rights. Activity four promotes writing and thinking skills by having students express opinions on the secrecy of the Constitutional Convention by writing letters to a newspaper. The fifth activity describes life in 1787 through a fictitious press conference with Dolly Madison. Other activities (crossword puzzles, word searches, and a trivia game) teach important terms and facts associated with the Constitution. A bibliography is included. (SM)

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ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING THE U.S. CONSTITUTION IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

by

Denee J. Corbin

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EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

These objectives have been taken from fifth grade social studies texts which represent approximately 80% of the texts used across the nation.

This has been done in the hope that teachers will be able to incorporate these materials into an already existing curriculum.

Students will be able to:

1. Identify three problems faced by the new nation after the revolution.
2. List conflicting points of view involved in the writing of the Constitution.
3. Explain the purpose of the Constitutional Convention.
4. List three powers given to the government by the Constitution.
5. Rewrite the Preamble to the Constitution in their own words.
6. Identify definitions of terms dealing with the Constitution.
7. Identify the three branches of government provided for in the Constitution.
8. Locate particular statements in the Constitution and relate statements to particular situations.
9. Think about and discuss how life in the United States of 1787 effected the development of the Constitution.
10. Discuss rights which are protected in the Bill of Rights.

These activities are not meant to be a complete unit on the Constitution for fifth graders but rather materials to be used as supplemental to texts and established curriculum.

Questions and activities were written to encourage discussion and critical thinking on the part of the students.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WHAT IS A CONSTITUTION?

Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, James Madison and others who wrote our Constitution wanted to create something that would last a long time. They knew their decisions were important.

The Constitution is written law. It is the supreme law of the land. That means all other laws must agree with it.

The Constitution is also a plan for the way our government should work.

Those who met in Philadelphia in 1787 didn't want our government or any one person to have too much power. So our Constitution tells about powers government officials have and plans for limiting powers.

Our Constitution does three important things for us.

1) It is a written document that is the supreme law of the land.
2) It is a plan for the way our government should work.
3) It grants power and limits powers of the government.

1. What article plans for the Constitution to be the highest law? What does the article say about the governments of each of the states? _____

_____

_____

2. The Constitution is a plan for the way our government should work. At the Constitutional Convention, they worked out a plan for a federal system. That means that power is divided between the national and state governments. Find three places in your copy of the Constitution that talks about the responsibilities and rights of the states._____

_____

_____

_____

3. The Constitution describes three branches of government. On the lines below, list each branch and the article of the Constitution that explains each branch._____

_____

_____

_____

4. Look at the Amendments. Find at least two that limit the power of our government._____

_____

_____

WHY DID THEY WRITE A CONSTITUTION?

> We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

This is the preamble of the U.S. Constitution. The men at the Philadelphia Convention wrote this to explain why they wrote the Constitution the way they did.

If you read the preamble carefully, you will be able to find the six reasons they gave for writing the Constitution. Write one reason on each of the lines below. Then rewrite each reason in your own words. You may use a dictionary.

1. _____
_____
2. _____
_____
3. _____
_____
4. _____
_____
5. _____
_____
6. _____
_____

Pick one of the reasons you have written on the lines above. What part of the Constitution explains how that goal was accomplished? In your own words, tell what the Constitution says.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

THE CONSTITUTION PROTECTS OUR RIGHTS

You have a copy of the Constitution on another page. These are not the exact words that were written in Philadelphia in 1787, but these words tell you what the Constitution says in a way that is easier for you to understand.

Read each paragraph below. Then write down the part of the Constitution that plans for such a situation.

1. Alan Hall moved his family west. They wanted to farm their own land. The farm had 160 acres. Most farms were about the same size so neighbors lived far away. Families helped each other harvest the corn, plant the wheat or build barns. Farmers traded with neighbors-a day's work for a barrel of apples or a keg of cider for a pig. Even though they helped each other, farm families had to work hard and be independent. Besides the food they grew, Alan went hunting to provide food for his family. The gun was an important tool and was always kept in a safe place.

   What part of the Constitution protects the Hall's right to own a gun?

   _____

2. Susan Padgett was a widow in Boston. She ran the Porthole Inn. She served good meals to travelers and people who came to Boston on business. In the years before the Revolutionary War, she wanted the American Colonies to be independent. She did not like being taxed on tea and other things she needed in her inn. When people in Boston rebelled against the taxes, King George III sent British soldiers. King George's law said Susan had to let the Redcoats stay at her inn. Even though she was paid, she did not want the soldiers. When the soldiers were there her regular customers did not come to the inn.

   What part of the Constitution protects Susan from being forced to have soldiers stay in her inn?_____

3. Arthur Pease was a New England merchant. His wife and sons helped with his business and they all worked hard. Even though New England had no representatives in Parliament, King George III and Parliament passed a law called the Stamp Act in 1765. The King wanted to raise money to pay bills from the expensive French and Indian War. He didn't ask the people of the colonies, he <u>told</u> them they had to pay a tax on newspapers, playing cards, almanacs, birth certificates, and even some business papers. Arthur thought the tax was unfair. He joined the Sons of Liberty and refused to buy goods from Britain. The Stamp Act was finally repealed but Arthur and his family wanted the new constitution to protect them from such laws without their representation.

   What part of the Constitution protects Arthur and his family by explaining how laws will be made? _____

CONSTITUTION WORD SEARCH

A C Y F E D E R A L R E P U B L I C F B H
L W O T O E M J A M E S M A D I S O N I C
W O C Q E S I M O R P M O C A R T O R I E
A K O I P S S E I Z U A R T I C L E S L E
S V N U R E O U R L B E T A G E L E D O P
H E S T E N M Y S T L W S Q M A L I G F S
I T T N A A P O W S I A T T P S O T M R F
N O I E M T A I N S C D A N G O O W T I O
G F T M B E C E R E F R T E H O U S E G M
T T U D L C B D A R G F E D D E J E E H O
O L T N E O U L T G H O S I L I N D F T D
N E I E W L V O E N Z S R S M O O U L S E
P M O M E U S A T O V T W E C U R S I T E
M E N A L M D C J C J W E R E I S E H G R
P H I L A D E L P H I A X P S E A L F R F
S R U S U P R E M E C O U R T F R M T O D
K I G E C A W V U T S R Y F I T A R K L J

FEDERAL
REPUBLIC
JAMES MADISON
ARTICLES
HOUSE
PHILADELPHIA
WASHINGTON
FREEDOM OF SPEECH
BILL OF RIGHTS
CONSTITUTION
VETO
AMENDMENT
SENATE
CONGRESS
REPUBLIC
PRESIDENT
DELEGATE
SUPREME COURT
COMPROMISE
RATIFY

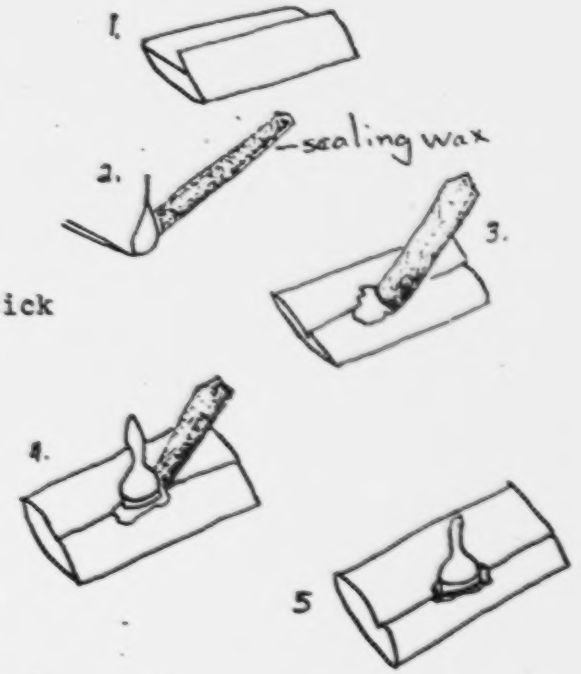
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What do you think the people of Philadelphia and the rest of the United States would have said if they had known what was being said during the sessions of the Constitutional Convention? Imagine that you were a citizen in Philadelphia during the hot summer of 1787. Imagine, too, that the meetings were not being kept a secret. Based on what you have heard from the delegates to the Convention, write a letter to the editor of the Philadelphia newspaper expressing how you feel.

After you have written your letter, use the quill pen to sign your name and the sealing wax to seal your letter.

SEALING YOUR LETTER WITH SEALING WAX

1. Fold the paper like this.
2. Light the stick of sealing wax. When the end is soft, squish it on the paper.
3. Without lifting the stick of wax, immediately press the seal on the blob and then pull the stick of wax away while you are still pressing down on the seal.
4. Press the seal hard, then pull it away.



PRESS CONFERENCE QUESTIONS (Originally written for Dolley Madison wife of James Madison. However this script can be adapted to be used otherwise.)

1. Why did the ladies cut pieces of Mr. Madison's shirt at your wedding?

   There were no cameras. As a momento of someone, we often carried a lock of hair or a piece of cloth to remind us of those we cared about.

2. Whose idea was it to have a Constitutional Convention?

   Many people, but George Washington and James Madison both worked hard for it. Jemmie convinced our legislature here in Virginia to invite representatives from all thirteen states to meet and discuss amendments to the Articles of Confederation. The changes he wanted to talk about had to do with regulating trade and business between the states. Only New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Virginia sent delegates to the meeting in Annapolis, Maryland. They met from September 11-14, 1786. Mr. Madison was disappointed at the turnout. The delegates who did come decided not to discuss changing the Articles of Confederation. They sent out a report instead. The report invited the thirteen states to send delegates to a convention in Philadelphia in May, 1787. The report was also sent to Congress. The purpose of the meeting was to change the Articles of Confederation. Alexander Hamilton wrote the report of this meeting in Annapolis.

3. Why was George Washington chosen leader of the Constitutional Convention?

   There are very likely many reasons. Mr. Washington, along with Mr. Madison and Mr. Hamilton all were instrumental in organizing the convention. George Washington is one of the most loved men of our country and those who knew him best loved him most. He was a war hero. It was clear to the American people that Washington had worked a miracle--only he could have held his shaky army together in the face of the British army. He was tall and strong with incredible stamina. And because of his many years as a farmer he was a practical man with the ability to look at problems and face them. He was a good speaker, energetic, big and intelligent and assertive. The men at the Constitutional Convention knew George was a good leader so one of the first things they did was elect him to lead their meetings.

4. Did everybody know how important this Convention was going to be?

   Oh yes, as the date of the meeting got closer, excitement around the country grew. Almost everyone realized that the men going to Philadelphia were an astonishing group. They were men of intelligence, character and great ability. Jefferson, Adams and Jay and Patrick Henry all were not there but they commented on the patriotism and talents and experience of the group that had been chosen to go. Through the spring, newspapers everywhere remarked on the approaching event. One newspaper said, "The political existence of the United States perhaps depends on the result of the Convention which is to be held in Philadelphia in May next."

5. Why weren't John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry there?

John Adams was representing our country in England. Thomas Jefferson our ambassador to France. Patrick Henry refused to attend the convention because he liked the Articles of Confederation just the way they were. He was afraid the men at the Convention would make changes that would threaten the rights of the states.

6. How did the men at the Convention make decisions?

Of course everyone at the Convention in Philadelphia did not agree on all things discussed. They first decided that no matter how many representatives a state had at the meetings, each state would get only one vote. But, the states did not agree on many things. Many arguments began. In fact sometimes it was feared that the Convention would fail because of so many disagreements. Mr. Randolph presented a plan called the Virginia Plan, Mr. Paterson presented a New Jersey Plan and Mr. Sherman presented the Connecticut Plan. All of the plans had some good ideas but no one could agree on which plan was best. So the men at the convention made compromises. So decisions were made by voting and compromising.

7. Why was it decided that only certain people could vote?

The state constitutions allowed more Americans to vote than any other country at that time. But you are right, many people did not have the right to vote. None of the states allowed women to vote. In fact, most states only allowed men who owned property or paid taxes to vote. Since women could not own property, they weren't allowed to vote. People thought that women would vote just as their husband or fathers would vote instead of thinking for themselves. Not very many people even thought that the law about women voting should be changed. Abigail Adams did, though. While John was away with our country's business, Abigail worked hard on their family farm at Braintree, Massachusetts. She was very good at it and the farm made a profit. She wrote to John while he was in Philadelphia working on the Declaration of Independence. She said, "If particular care and attention are not paid the ladies, we will not hold ourselves bound to obey any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

Blacks were not allowed to vote, either. Even black Americans who owned property could not vote. Many of the northern states had constitutions that freed the slaves but voting was still not allowed. Most slaves lived in the southern states. One of the decisions the men at the convention made was a compromise about how to count slaves for representation in Congress. Actually, they were counted but there was no one in Congress who represented how the Black people of the south felt about their government.

8. Why did the delegates decide to keep secret all that was said in the meetings?

   Everyone wanted the discussions of the convention to be kept a secret because they wanted to be able to talk freely...Kind of think out loud and have the option to change their minds. They wanted to think about all the things that were said and talk without the pressure of reports in the newspapers. Even the people in Philadelphia did not know what was going on. Guards were posted at the doors and only the delegates were allowed inside during the meetings. All the windows were closed even though it was in the hot summer months so that no one on the street below could hear the discussions. James kept notes on all that went on during the meetings. After he served as president for eight years, I helped him copy his notes but they are kept in a safe place and will not be published for some time.

9. What did all the people in the states think of the new Constitution when it was finished?

   After the Convention in Philadelphia, all the delegates went home to their own states. They took with them copies of the new Constitution. It could not be law until nine states ratified the document. But, of course, if the United States was to become a strong country, the new Constitution would need the support of all 13 states. In many states, the arguments over the new Constitution were as bitter as the arguments in Philadelphia. Most of those who disagreed with the new Constitution wanted a bill of rights added to it. Finally, writers of the Constitution agreed to add a bill of rights later. Then all states but Rhode Island agreed to the new Constitution. In 1790, Rhode Island supported the new Constitution.

CONSTITUTION TRIVIA

1. The oldest man attending the Constitutional Convention was Benjamin Franklin at age 81.
2. Straw was spread over the cobblestones outside of Independence Hall so that wagons and horses would not disturb the men working on the Constitution.
3. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams did not attend the Constitutional Convention because they were in Europe representing the U.S.
4. James Madison is knows as "The Father of the Constitution."
5. The Constitutional Convention was held in secrecy.
6. Two-thirds of the world's countries have had a new constitution since 1970.
7. The "average" country in the world has had two constitutions since World War II.
8. The U.S. Constitution was the first WRITTEN constitution.
9. The U.S. Constitution was the first to be written by people meeting in convention for such a purpose.
10. Rhode Island was the only state not in attendance at the Constitutional Convention.
11. George Washington was elected to preside over the Constitutional Convention.
12. James Madison took notes on the proceedings and Dolley, his wife, sold them to the U.S. government years later after his death.
13. More than 12 years elapsed between the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and the establishment of the U.S. government under the Constitution.
14. Seven signers of the Declaration of Independence attended the Constitutional Convention.
15. Fifty-five delegates attended the Constitutional Convention.
16. Thirty-eight delegates signed the Constitution.
17. John Dickinson signed the Constitution by Proxy.
18. Three delegates--George Mason, Elbridge Gerry and Edmund Randolph--refused to sign the Constitution.
19. Patrick Henry refused to attend the Constitutional Convention because he thought a strong central government would take away rights of the states.
20. Delaware was the first state to ratify the Constitution.
21. The first Congress under the Constitution met in 1789 in New York.
22. The Supreme Court of the U.S. was first organized in 1790.
23. John Jay was the first Chief Justice.

24. Rhode Island was the 13th state to ratify the Constitution in 1790.

25. The Bill of Rights were ratified and became effective in 1791; four years after the Constitution was written.

26. Jonathan Dayton was the youngest man to sign the Constitution at age 27.

27. Nathaniel Gorham introduced the last proposal which was adopted unanimously before it was signed by the delegates. (to increase the number of representatives in Congress to one for every 30,000 citizens.)

28. Roger Sherman was opposed to a popular election. Instead he favored that public officers be elected by the state legislatures.

29. James Madison, the last surviving signer of the Constitution, died in 1836, 49 years after the document was written.

30. Nineteen of the signers of the Constitution were lawyers.

31. Only two of the signers of the Constitution later became President of the United States--George Washington and James Madison.

32. Seven signers of the Constitution were born outside the North American Colonies--four in Ireland, one each in England, Scotland and West Indies.

TRAVEL TIMES TO WASHINGTON D. C.

CITY	1791	1830	1860	1915	NOW
Boston	8 days	4 days	1 day	11 hours	1¼ hours
Charleston	6 days	3 days	1½ days	15 hours	1¼ hours
New Orleans		14 days	5½ days	1½ days	2½ hours
Chicago		18 days	2 days	20 hours	1 hours
Austin			14 days	2½ days	3 hours
San Francisco			34 days	4½ days	5½ hours
Denver				2½ days	3½ hours

Even before Washington D.C. was built, traveling in the new country was difficult. The new country was much bigger than most other countries. People lived along the Atlantic coast in an area that was 1,200 miles from north to south. They had moved west so that many people lived up to 200 miles inland.

There were people who thought the U.S. was too big to be just one country. There were transportation problems. By the time the Constitution was written in 1787, most of the country was still a forest. There were a few roads that went from one state into another state but they were often rough and muddy. These roads were not like the gravel roads we have today. They were not raised so that when it rained there was water standing and the ruts became deeper. Creeks and rivers had no bridges so they had to be forded or crossed by ferry. Coaches and wagons tipped over on the rough roads and got stuck in the mud. In the spring when the rivers flooded, travelers often drowned. On the very best roads, travelers could go 50 miles a day but most of the time they were lucky to go twenty miles. It would take many weeks to go from Boston to Charleston.

The mail was taken by horse riders who traveled faster. In good weather it still took them four days to go from Boston to Philadelphia.

Because the country was so big and traveling was hard, Americans rarely made a trip that was farther than fifty miles.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Look at the chart on this page. Why are some cities not listed in every column?_____

2. Give at least two reasons why you think travel times kept getting shorter._____

_____

3. The men at the Constitutional Convention were worried about representatives doing exactly what the people back home wanted them to do. Why did these travel problems add to their worries?

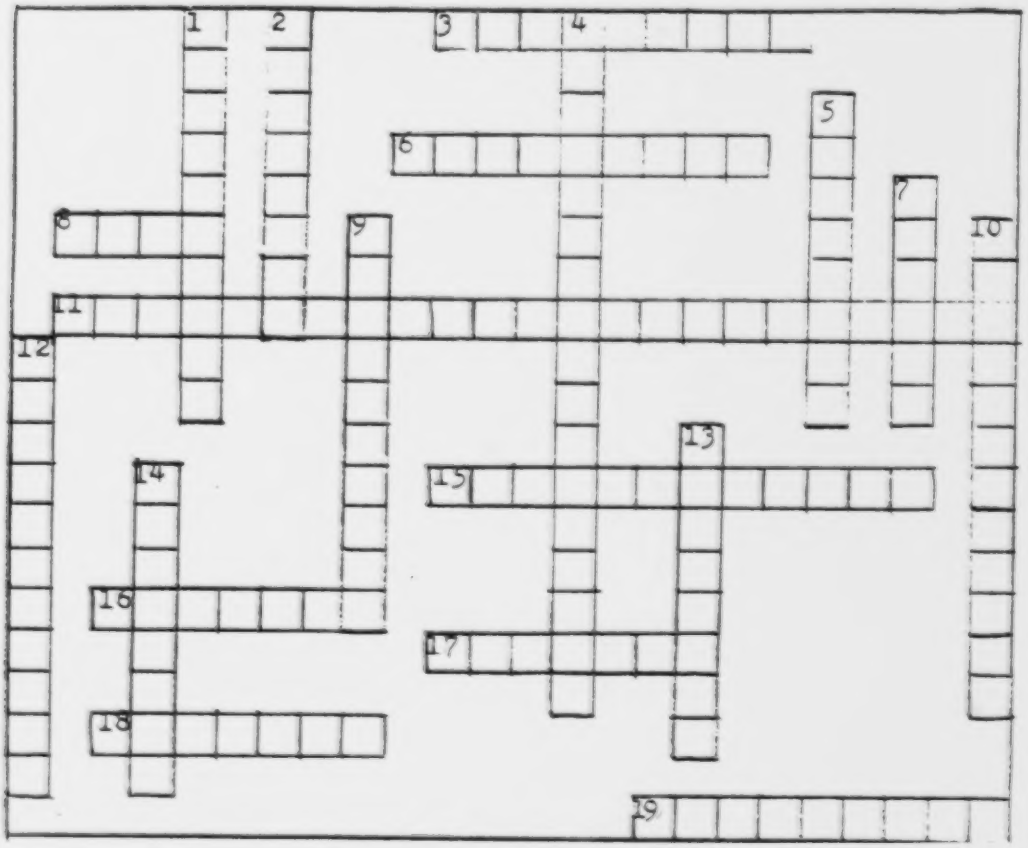
_____

_____

_____

4. With the modern transportation and communication systems of today, do we still need to be concerned about our representatives? How can we let them know what we want? _____

THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



DOWN

1. A settlement in which both sides give up something to reach an agreement.
2. The branch of government headed by the Supreme Court
4. A system of sharing power to prevent one branch of government from becoming too powerful.
5. A representative
7. To approve
9. Elected leader of the Constitutional Convention
10. A plan that lists powers and tells how a government is supposed to work
12. The branch of government that makes the laws
13. A form of government where officials are elected by the people
14. The introduction to the United States Constitution.

ACROSS

3. The branch of government that has the power to carry out the laws
6. A form of government that gets its power from the people of the country
8. Refusal to approve a law
11. The first plan of government for the United States
15. The city where the Constitutional Convention was held
16. Sometimes called the "Father of the Constitution"
17. A system that divides power between a central and state governments
18. Member of the electoral college
19. A change in the Constitution

MONEY PROBLEMS FOR THE NEW COUNTRY

While the United States was governed by the Articles of Confederation, business and commerce in the states suffered from the economic problems caused by the Revolution. People used gold and silver for money. It was called hard money. As the hard money became scarce, merchants were forced to accept payment in goods rather than coins. Farmers had trouble paying their debts and their taxes and many were afraid they would lose their land. Paper dollars were a new idea. They were issued by some states to ease the problems but people didn't trust paper money. It soon lost its value. People were worried and talked a lot about money problems. "Most of our political evils," James Madison wrote, "may be traced to our commercial ones."

1. What is hard money?_____

2. Each state made different paper money. What problems do you think some people had when they traveled from one state to another?

_____

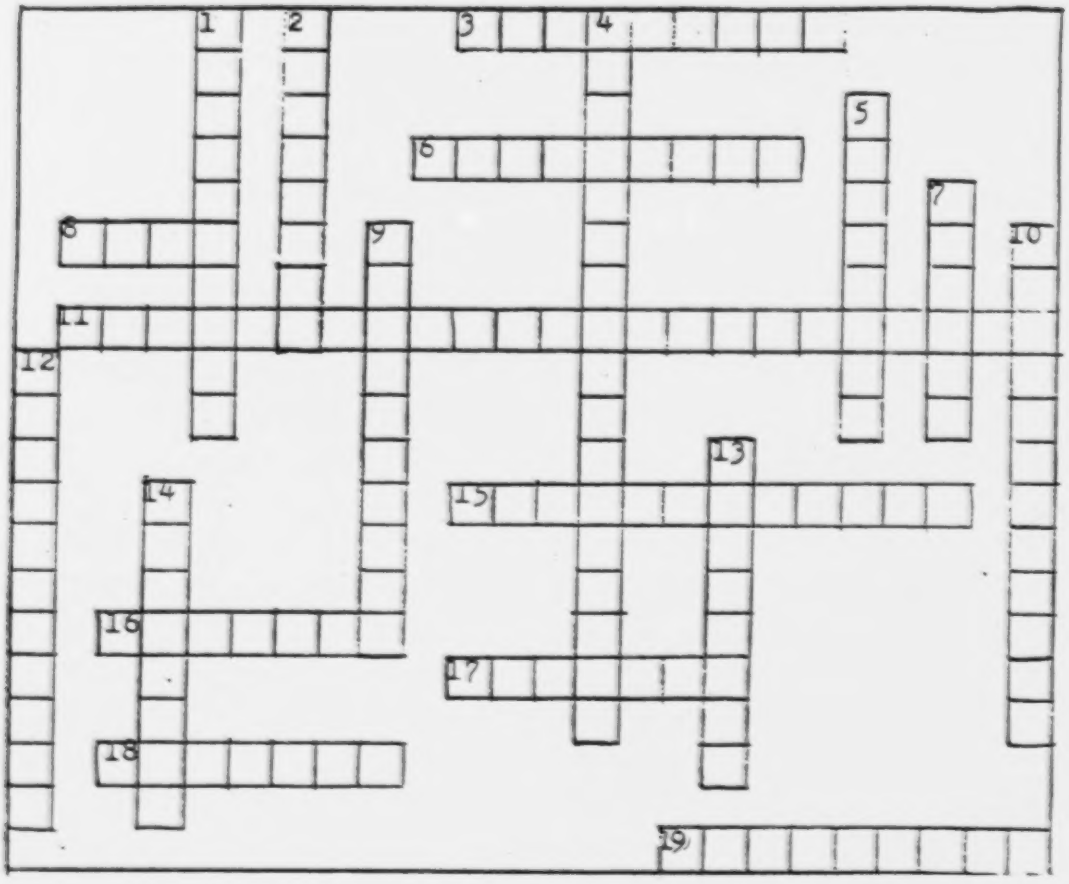
3. People today are used to using paper money instead of gold or silver. List some reasons why you think people didn't like using paper money at first._____

4. What do you think James Madison meant by the word "evil?"_____

"political?"_____

"commerce?"_____

THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



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